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Johnson Told That Aid Program Must Remain Interdependent

By FELIX BELAIR Jr.
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WASHINGTON, Feb. 5 — House managers of foreign aid legislation told President Johnson at a White House dinner meeting last night that economic and military assistance must continue hanging together or they would surely hang separately.

Some 30 members of the House and Senate who have have been critical of some part of the air program were invited to the meeting along with the interdepartmental study group headed by Under Secretary of State George W. Ball. The interdepedence of the economic and miltary aid programs as a matter of legislative tactics was one of the few points on which there was a consensus.

The President has been weighing the idea of assigning the miltary aid program entirely to the Defense Department instead of continuing it under the Agency for International Development. The $1 billion earmarked in the new budget for this purpose out of $3.4 billion for the total aid porgram was put under the defense budget.

Scant Support for Plan

But only one of the House members who attended last night's meeting supported a proposal by Senator J. W. Fulbright that the economic and military aid programs should be presented in different bills and considered by different legislative committees. He was Representative Gerald R. Ford of Michigan, chairman of the Republican Conference of the House.

As chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, Senator Fulbright has been trying for years to have the military aid program assigned to the Armed Services Committee and considered a part of the national defense budget.

He was supported at the meeting by several other Senators as well as Representative Ford in his argument that the two programs should be considered separately and on their own merits. He contended that to combine the two programs in the same legislation was a "deception of the public."

The idea of separating the military from the economic program was revived by the Administration study group as a method of reducing the total price tag on the foreign aid legislation. It is not a new thought, having been suggested originally during the first Eisenhower Administration.

Deeper Cuts Feared

However, the proposal has always been resisted in the House, where leaders feared that much deeper cuts would be made in economic aid if that program was considered separately from military assistance.

It was the same at last night's meeting. Senator Fulbright demanded to know from any of those present why the two programs should not be separated.

Representative Wayne L. Hays, Democrat of Ohio, a member of the Foreign Affairs Committee, was on his feet a split second ahead of Representative Thomas E. Morgan, Democrat of Pennsylvania, chairman of the committee.

"The best reason I can think of right quick is that we have to get elected every two years and you only have to go before the voters every six," the Ohioan shouted.

President Johnson opened the discussion as his guests helped themselves to cigars and brandy. He introduced Mr. Ball, who touched briefly on alternatives to the present administrative organization of the aid program.

But there was no indication of any interest among House or Senate members in an administrative overhaul. Those who talked about the meeting today said they came away with the impression that President Johnson was not enthusiastic about any administrative reorganization either.

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